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THE  
LESSONS OF THE LIFE  
OF  
REV. ALFRED GRIFFITH.

A MEMORIAL SERMON.

PREACHED IN THE M. E. CHURCH, ALEXANDRIA, VA.

*Sabbath, April 30, 1877.*

BY REV. W. F. HEMENWAY; A. M.

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## A MEMORIAL SERMON.

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"He being dead yet speaketh."—*Heb.* xi. 4.

The ripened fruit falls not untimely. Rich and golden has been the fruitage of Methodism. In every era of her history has the Methodist Church rejoiced in ripened fruit that falling, has been garnered in Heaven, the memory of which will be fragrant with lessons of holy living through all time.

Men they were, having grand conceptions of life, who wrought those conceptions into acts which will forever speak forth their praise.

No names in all the history of the church shine with brighter or with purer lustre, than do those of the early heroes of our own loved Methodism. Nor has the glory of the former day grown dim in later years.

We are met this morning to commemorate the life and virtues of one whose heroism and whose exalted character, though not the kind that poets mostly sing, yet were a worthy theme for earth's most gifted songsters.

It is not my purpose to attempt any panegyric of Rev. ALFRED GRIFFITH. He needs none.

A life whose broad base was an unswerving fealty to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus; whose towering majesty was reared in mighty deeds through heavenly inspiration; whose summit grandeur stood out in clear cut lines, far above the heights the world delights to climb, needs not the praise of feeble words to give it greatness. It is by association with such a life that words themselves are winged and become immortal.

Nor do I purpose to come and lay an offering upon his tomb. There will be others, pilgrims to this shrine, who in fitter words than I can speak will bring their wealth of poesy, and their tribute of eloquence and wreath his memory with garlands. It is mine this morning to go over his ministerial pathway of more than sixty-six years and gather up the lessons of his life, a string of pearls, and show them here.

Rev. Alfred Griffith was born in Montgomery Co., Md., March 16th, 1783. He was converted under the ministry of Rev. John Potts, in 1801, during a revival of religion, which began on Montgomery circuit while Rev. Wilson Lee was stationed there. He was received into the Methodist Episcopal Church by Rev. David Stevens, and soon thereafter was appointed a class leader.

His first sermon was delivered under the following circumstances. With other people of his neighborhood he had gathered to listen to a sermon to be preached by a certain Local Preacher. For some reason the expected preacher did not appear, and after waiting for some time some of the older brethren went to Mr. Griffith and requested him to conduct the services and preach to the people. He refused to do this, pleading his youth, his ignorance, his timidity, and his want of a Divine call, as reasons why he should be excused. His brethren persistently urging him not to permit the congregation to disperse without an exhortation, he at length went alone to the forest, which was near, to ask of God his duty. After some time spent there in fervent supplication he returned to the house, and immediately entered the pulpit. What transpired there he was never able to recall. He only had a confused memory that the power of the Holy Ghost came upon him, and that the authority of his ministry was attested by mingled groans and tears, and cries for mercy, and loud shouts and halleluiahs.

At a quarterly meeting held soon after this occurrence, the Presiding Elder, Rev. Enoch George, afterward Bishop George of blessed memory, hearing an account of this remarkable scene, wrote for Mr. Griffith a license to preach, and left it with the preacher in charge of the circuit. He, approaching Mr. Griffith one day, handed the paper to him, folded. As soon as he had opened and read the paper he was so agitated that he let it fall. The preacher picking it up and handing it again to him warned him against slighting a call from God.

At a quarterly Conference just prior to the Conference held in Baltimore in 1806, his pastor, Rev. Gideon Draper, presented his name to the Elder for recommendation for admission on trial in the travelling connection. This it seems was entirely unexpected by Mr. Griffith, for he immediately arose and began to plead a variety of reasons why he could not undertake so responsible a life work. Mr. Draper was equal to the emergency. Springing to his feet he cried out "Flash in the pan if you dare Brother Griffith. I tell you you must preach or God will kill you." So Enoch George recommended him, and he was received on trial in the Baltimore Conference March 16th, 1806, being, at that time just twenty-three years of age.

At that Conference he was appointed to the Wyoming Circuit, a vast tract of unexplored country more than three hundred miles in extent, in whose bounds are now found parts of six Annual Conferences. It is not our purpose, nor is there time on the present occasion to follow him in detail and at large through this and the subsequent fields of his ministerial labor. The next year, 1807, he was appointed to Berkley; in 1808, to Baltimore Circuit; in 1809, to Severn; in 1810, to Calvert. In 1811 he was appointed to Montgomery Circuit, his former home, to which he was returned the second year, a thing that in those days of Methodism was

rarely known. During his two years of labor here he was married. In 1813 he was appointed to Annapolis, to which he was in after years twice returned, viz: in 1823—24 and 1850—51. In 1814 he was appointed to Fell's Point; in 1815, and again in '36 and '37, to City Station. In 1816—17 he was appointed to this place (Alexandria) and again in 1843—44. At this point, for want of a better opportunity let me advert to some features of his ministry during his first appointment to Alexandria. The results of those two years are known by the records of the church, which are still preserved at the parsonage. And as I read them carefully, I could almost see Mr. Griffith, as he moved among the people here, an evangel of salvation to scores of souls. In the carefully kept record of the church membership, in his own hand writing, there is preserved the history of his ministry. It seems from the record that he preached in Alexandria every other sabbath. For every two weeks there are recorded accessions to the church, varying in number from five to twenty persons. And while I read, I could but recall those glorious days when in answer to the stirring appeals of Alfred Griffith, in this same old church, moved by the power of the Holy Ghost, sinners came at every service flocking to this same altar, seeking the Lord Jesus. And the picture of imagination showed me those same sinners rejoicing in their new found love, while the happy preacher made these walls ring again and again with his glad halleluiahs and shouts of victory.

O my brethren, has the power of those days passed entirely away from the church? Can we no longer preach in these walls, hallowed by such glorious memories, and expect to *see* the fruit of our labors? Was it the privilege alone of our fathers to sow the seed and then immediately thrust in the sickle and reap; while we their sons must be content to wait the slow moving of years, before the harvest of our



seeding may be gathered in? No, I believe the God of Alfred Griffith is the same God to-day; that the God of our fathers, is the God of their sons; and if we will come to him in the same faith, if we will go out to reap as well as to scatter seed, we too, as they did, may come again at every service, bringing our sheaves with us. O may the spirit of the former day fall upon us all, people and preacher, that our labor for souls may be blessed to this city as were those labors in 1816—17!

In 1818—19 he was appointed to Fairfax Circuit; in '20 and '21, to Frederick Circuit; in '22 to Harford; in '25 and '26, to Carlisle. He was then compelled by providential circumstances to cease from traveling, and for four years held the relation of a Supernumerary.

In 1831 he returned to the regular work, and was stationed at Liberty. In 1832 he was appointed Presiding Elder of Baltimore District, where he was continued four years. In 1838 he was appointed to Carlisle District; in '39 and thereafter for three years he was Presiding Elder on North Baltimore District; in '42 he was appointed to North Baltimore; in '45, to Georgetown; in '46, to Carlisle District where he served the four following years. In 1852—53 he was appointed to Summerfield, and in '54—55, to Ryland Chapel, Washington, where he closed his effective and successful ministry of a half century. For five years thereafter he held a supernumerary relation, and from thence to his death a superannuate relation to the Baltimore Conference. Such is the record of his ministerial life. He served the church in other important places. Trusts of the greatest importance were unhesitatingly committed to his hands. As a delegate to the General Conference in 1816—20—32—36—40—44 down even till 1860, as trustee of colleges, and in other ways his brethren honored his ability with their full confidence.

This life so full of great deeds, so eloquent in its lessons, closed upon earth, April 15, 1871.

And "being dead, he yet speaketh."

The span of a lifetime neither measures the power of a life, nor ends the lessons of a life. The death which gives the body to corruption, has no power over the life which is past. That, with all its lessons, with its honors or its crimes, rolls on, a power forever. It is no longer the exclusive property of a single person, it has become the heritage of the world. It may have been a life born to exclusive privileges, a life endowed with peculiar and rare talents. It may be that for it especially the sun has shone, the rains have fallen, and the ground yielded her increase. For it, both earth and ocean, may have been alive with agencies. For it, rank and power and influence may have combined to weave a royal garb. Yet the success of that life, the results of those agencies, the lessons of that royal living, become the common inheritance of all men. Every man is a part of earth's grand human system, and whether he be royal sun or only some plebian meteorite, he can by no choice and power of his own detach himself from that system. He is bound to it by bonds he cannot break, and in turn has over the other parts of the same system the same kind of power as that to which he himself yields. Every man then is a fountain of influence, either good or bad, conservative or destructive. Whether he will or not, he is a power entering into and shaping the course of the life of others.

And this power is not measured by this life's extent. In this way he is immortal. His language, his habits, his thoughts live on, coloring the ideas, impressing the character, influencing the life of others forever,

He may not have intended to do all this. He may have made himself the sole object of his living. All his plans,

all his aspirations may have revolved around himself. He may have made it the study of his whole life to make all things converge to himself; reaching out his hands, grasping all of wealth he could control, all of honor he could reach, all of power that he could gain, to bring them all and place them as sacrifices upon the altar of his selfishness; yet the very energy he expended on himself gave wings to his influence, and became a power to mould the life of others.

If this be true of one whose only idea of living was to live for himself alone, much more is it true of him who lived to disperse his benefits. Though the world may be poorer by the death of such an one, yet it has an inestimable treasure in his life.

Of such a character was the life of Rev. Alfred Griffith. His was a life of beneficence. The vigor of his manhood was poured out for the world, the greatness of his endowments was used for men.

He took all the circumstances of his life, all the gifts of Providence, all the endowments of his nature, and training them up, turned them for the welfare of men. And though in the eclipse of his life there is a public calamity, yet along his life's way, as along the pathway of one of heaven's meteors, there is left a light beside which the lives of heroes and warriors glimmer but faintly.

A complete representation of Mr. Griffith is found only in his character as a Methodist Minister. This is the focal point of his whole life. The point to which he made all things converge, and from which as from a luminous centre there radiated a light which bathed all his life with a glory.

This being the centre of his life, it is from this point we must learn the lessons of his living. From any other place of observation we shall see only a chaotic maze of perplexity and doubt; but from this point we may behold his

life a towering mountain of successful living, down whose sides run rivers of healthful instruction.

*The primal idea of his life, was living for Christ.* This is the only reasonable centre of a life. We can never comprehend christian experience, or our duties rightly till we project the centre of our life from ourselves and fix it in God. The philosophy of our life must be "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."

In the earlier ages of the christian era Ptolemy, an Egyptian astronomer, taught that the earth was the centre of the universe, and that the sun, moon and stars all moved in order around it, but in after years when Copernicus revived the ancient theory of Pythagoras and confirmed its truth by mathematical demonstration, the earth retiring from her proud position as the unmoved center, became a humble satellite to wait upon the sun. So worldly wisdom fixes man as central, but when the Gospel brings in its "sublime calculus of faith" the centre is removed from man to God, and the life no longer a hopeless confusion moves on, blending in a harmonious unity all that before seemed so irreconcilable and contradictory.

How sublime is that character whose greatness is in harmony with God. How sovereign is that life which knows no fear but the fear of God, no impulse but the love of Jesus, and no inspiration but the Master's will. His life receiving its motion from the hands of Omnipotence, stops not at trials and obstacles over which others stumble, but moves easily and evenly over them all.

His faith quickened by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, falters not at peril, or sacrifice, or suffering. His heart is fixed, trusting in God. Trusting in God, he moves right on. Compelled to wander in the desert, pillowing his head upon a stone, trusting in God, he lies down to slumber and awakens

in the morning to tell of his angel visitors. Betrayed by his brethren's hatred and sold to wandering Midianites, trusting in God, he bravely treads his wearv pathway through Egypt's slavery and Egypt's dungeons, and finds at last his reward on Egypt's throne.

Persecuted for righteousness he must renounce his God and bow to the golden image or the fiery furnace, heated seven times hotter than it was wont, will test his faith. Trusting in God to deliver, he shrinks not from the trial but comes forth unharmed, to tell the astonished persecutors of angel deliverance. Living for Jesus! O, my brother is this your life? Have you discovered here the secret of successful living? This is the key that unlocks the secret of Alfred Griffith's success. He lived for Jesus. He made Christ's interests the test by which he tried everything. For Jesus he poured out the vigor of his life ; for Jesus he gave the treasure of his intellect. By the rule of Jesus' interests he solved the most intricate problems of christian casuistry. Hence where others were doubtful, he felt sure. Where others were fearing, he was bold. Where others were distrustful, he was confident. Where others consulted expediency, he, Christ's interests. So he gave himself fully for Jesus. His circuit may stretch hundreds of miles into the unexplored wilderness, he falters not, but cheerfully goes to his work. It may take him for months away from his home ; may expose him to the perils of fierce wild beasts and yet fiercer savages ; may try his very soul within him ; yet none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself so that he might finish his course with joy and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus.

O, are you living for Jesus? You are making a fortune. Is it that you may do good? You are gaining honor. Is it that you may be more useful? Or did you come with the

crowd crying "Hosanna to the Son of David," saying "Lord I will follow thee whither thou goest," and when Jesus replied, "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head; Go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor and come take up thy cross and follow me," did you cowardly steal away too poor in true christian manhood to live for Jesus alone?

Living for Jesus only, Mr. Griffith was a faithful preacher of the Word of God. He was faithful in his preparation for Sunday services. He sought so far as he was able for a general acquaintance with knowledge. In history—especially church history—he was pre-eminent. It was a general subject of remark that he was a walking encyclopedia of facts and dates. So noted was he for his accurate memory, that his brethren were accustomed to take his statement of fact or date, unquestioned. And all his knowledge was not, as is too often the case in such minds, a mass of lumber useless to him for any general work. It was not crude material with which he had gorged himself, that he possessed, but it was knowledge perfectly digested, that had passed through all the stages of the transforming process till it had become a part of the muscle, bone, sinew and nerve of the mental man.

So his knowledge was all made available for the work of a minister of the Gospel. He was faithful to the truth. It was his constant endeavor to know "what is truth." He asked not, what will please the people, or what will make a sensation, or what will secure applause, but what is God's message. And finding this, he had supreme faith in it. It mattered but little to him how others might treat what he held as the truth. The whole world beside might disregard its force. According to the wisdom of this world it might look like foolishness. Men might heap contumely and reproach upon it. If he believed it to be the truth he would maintain it forever. He believed that God would honor his

truth, and though He might permit it to rest awhile under scorn and reproach, the day of revealing would come, when God would rescue it from its reproach. And he believed that he who had clung to that truth in the day of its dishonor would rise with it and share in its honor in the day of its exaltation.

He was a humble Minister. He shrank from the adulation of the world. His faith was never hindered by seeking honor of men. Among the grandest acts of his life, nay among the grandest acts of the world's history do I rank the humility with which he received his call to preach the Gospel.

It seems as if history was repeating itself. And I see Moses standing again on rocky Horeb. Again the flaming bush proclaims the present God. Again Jehovah commissions his servant to be a leader. Again the Prophet pleads his want of fitness, and pleads for power till armed with the all-compelling rod, he goes to his work, God's strangely favored agent.

So Alfred Griffith found his Horeb. So called was he to work for God. So plead he his want of fitness, till clothed upon by power divine, he too grasped his rod of power,—the story of the Cross,—and went out a leader of the Hosts of Israel. But not like Moses was he in his death. Moses must climb on Pisgah's top and only see his Canaan, while Alfred Griffith, like another Joshua, crosses between the parted waters of the Jordan and enters the Canaan to which he journeyed.

As a preacher his sermons were rich in thought. Few persons excelled him in the power of compact thought. He reasoned with mathematical exactness. Possessing sufficient imagination to fully equip the faculty of comparison he was however, far from possessing a poetical organization. His

conclusions were rather the decisive results of a calm logical inquiry, than the confident decisions of a sibylline oracle.

His habits of life show the reason for this precision of thought. He wrote but little. Hence his premises, his argument, and his conclusion all stood out in his mind in clearest plainness. Hence his thoughts were rendered with laconic brevity and axiomatic force. Hence his speeches were never long, and always pertinent and statesmanlike.

His sermons so filled with thought were addressed to the thoughtful. The educated minds, the thinkers of his congregations, more than others appreciated his sermons. One of the finest tributes ever paid to human eloquence was paid to Rev. Alfred Griffith by Frank Key, the gifted author of the "Star Spangled Banner," who enjoyed the ministry of Mr. Griffith while he was stationed in Annapolis.

Yet it is but just to say his efforts were very unequal. He had not the gift that some men possess of making airy nothings of interest to his congregations, hence when the machinery of his mental powers flagged he was dry and uninteresting. There were other times when he rose as far above the level of his ordinary self as occasionally he fell below it, times when he became the peer of any pulpit orator, when entranced by his eloquence the listening congregation hung upon his words. While, from all the sources of information I could reach, I was trying to make up my estimate of the source of this great man's power in the pulpit; I remarked to one who all his lifetime had known Mr. Griffith intimately, that I had not yet discovered any trace of what is popularly called magnetism in a public speaker, in Mr. Griffith, and that I had about decided to attribute the power of his pulpit ministrations, so far as it resided in himself merely, to the sheer force of his mental powers.

"That is in the main correct of his pulpit efforts" replied he, "yet on a few occasions I have seen him develope a mag-



netism equal to that displayed by the most eloquent man I ever heard." He had the happy faculty of equalling the demands of the occasion. At those times which required great effort he rose superior to himself. Under the pressure of a great demand he never failed to equal expectation. At the laying of the corner stone of Waugh Chapel, in Washington, some eloquent man of large renown had been secured to preach the sermon, while upon Mr. Griffith was laid the task of detaining the crowd in the open lot and raising a collection. As soon as the sermon was finished the congregation began to disperse. By relating in his own inimitable style the following incident he not only arrested the steps of the retiring congregation, but actually seated them again, and raised from them a large collection for the contemplated church.

In 1791 Ezekiel Cooper was appointed to Alexandria. There being no church there he began to look about for aid to purchase a lot and build one. Among the members of the church there was a Bernard Bryan who coming to Alexandria had established himself in business in a little cabin near the wharf. He had managed by patient industry and close economy to save five French crowns. To him Mr. Cooper first opened the project of building the church, and so enlisted was Mr. Bryan, immediately, that he offered to give one of the five crowns that he had saved. He went into the loft of his cabin, took from his leathen bag a single crown and when part way down the ladder stopped and began to talk to himself, as follows: "Now Bryan you can spare another crown as well as not, why not give it." No sooner said than done, and he clambered back into the loft, took out another crown and began again to descend the ladder. Before he reached the floor he stopped again, and after further consideration, concluded that in so important a work he ought to give God a full half of his crowns and retracing

his steps took the third crown and began again to descend. But the spirit of giving was upon him, and saying that a single crown would be enough for him, he went back and taking the fourth crown again descended. When on the middle of the ladder he again paused. The work was a great one. God's people were few in number and poor. He was in no immediate need and saying "God is pledged to keep me," he turned back, took the fifth and last crown and bringing them all, gave them into the astonished preacher's hands. That was the way Bernard Bryan gave all his crowns for the Lord, said Mr. Griffith in concluding. "And Jesus has given him an eternal crown, Glory to God," shouted Bishop Waugh, who was on the platform at the time.

Such was the anecdote through which Mr. Griffith wielded such marvellous power that day.

Another instance of this wonderful power of his, will suffice. He used to tell in his own peculiar style how once Mr. Asbury appointed Mr. Snethen to preach at eleven o'clock, and himself at three o'clock on Sabbath, at a certain camp-meeting. Said Mr. Griffith "it was no child's play to preach after Nicholas Snethen, and I made as full a preparation for preaching at the appointed time as I was able to make. At eleven o'clock we were all in the stand waiting for Mr. Snethen when a messenger came bringing me a note from Mr. S., saying he was unable to preach and I must preach in his place and he would take my place at three o'clock. There was no way of escaping, and so I went at it, and when I had finished I reckon if ever I preached a great sermon that was it." It is said that of the thousands who had gathered there that morning, but few ever knew that Mr. Griffith had preached. So well did he acquit himself that he measured up to the standard of Mr. Snethen, and the congregation were fully persuaded they had been listening to that great orator, whom Asbury named his "sil-

ver trumpet." Such are samples of many like instances of his power. When the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, it was as if an angel had touched his lips with fire, and his words glowed with the light and burned with the heat of living coals.

Mr. Griffith was a man of progress. He was not in any way allied to a stereotyped antiquity. He loved the past for its heroism, its self-denial and its inspiration to great deeds; yet with his eye turned toward the future he was fond of climbing historic Alleghanies and bending his ear, listening to the tramp of coming millions stepping to the music of Methodism.

Yet he believed not in a progress that unsettles the past. But a progress that was real, a progress that was logical, a progress that claimed China for Jesus, though General Conferences and Missionary Boards stood in the way, he heartily believed in.

And right cheerily did he welcome every movement forward that was for the good of the whole church.

In the movement of 1824 that resulted in the unhappy separation of '28 and '30 he was enlisted, till he saw the seed of coming evil to the church. He appreciated the good in that movement and favored it, till it was made the occasion of harm to the church, then he threw his whole weight against it.

He believed in an educated church and ministry. Methodism, born in a Univeasity and trained by a scholar, in its early days in this country, had neither schools for its children, nor educated men for its ministry. He saw a stable church could rest only on an instructed understanding. He felt that the great want of the church was educated men. She had them not, there was no source of supply; the only way was to make them, and he became an enthusiastic friend of schools and colleges.

The spirit of progress kept him ever young. He was to the last allied in sympathy to his brethren. Even after the darkness of death had shadowed his understanding, his sympathy and love for his brethren remained to the last. So long as he was able to go, he was present at every session of his Conference, and after increasing infirmities made it impossible to visit his brethren at the yearly convocation, he never omitted to write to the Conference a letter filled with richest gems of wisdom. To the very last he kept step to the throbbing heartbeat of a moving world. To know him best it was necessary to meet him in the social circle.

If in other places he was the peer of any, here he was king of all. Very fluent, he talked much, but always well. He never marred the fireside cheer with gloomy face. Cheerful without levity, easy and never coarse, he never degraded the minister into the trifler. His heart was full of noble, generous impulses and affectionate sympathy. He wept with the sorrowing and rejoiced with the glad.

He was the Christian Patriot. During the war of 1812 he was stationed at Annapolis and while there the city was threatened with an attack from the British vessels of war. Mr. Griffith taking his shovel and wheelbarrow worked on the fortifications till the city was placed beyond the reach of danger. Afterwards he provided himself with a musket, and declared himself ready to defend his country with his life. Though in after weeks he regretted the fervor into which his patriotism betrayed him, yet to the very end of his life he was a devoted lover of his country. If nowhere else in all his life he showed enthusiasm, he did in this, his love for the old flag.

He was a devoted Methodist. He believed in Methodist doctrine and discipline with all his heart. He watched the increase of Methodism, till in America, its membership had grown from 73,800 to more than 2,800,000. In nothing did

he more rejoice than in the triumphs of Methodism. In nothing was he pained more than in those movements which would bring harm to the church.

My brethren let us, this day, renew our love for the old church. Here, in this church, whose walls have resounded to the voices of the older heroes of Methodism, on this occasion may our love for the church of our fathers, be kindled anew. I am no bigot. I do not deny fellowship to any denomination. If a man has learned to love the Lord Jesus, I care not in what school he has learned to love him, whether it be in a Baptist, Presbyterian or Methodist school. But converted under a Methodist ministry, trained by Methodist discipline, nurtured by Methodist sympathy, it is meet that warm gushing love should swell our hearts for the church of our fathers.

Such was Alfred Griffith, as I have learned of him. "The life is with you, the man is gone. We look over the list of our early heroes and his place is vacant. Here we say "he has gone," but up yonder they say "he has come." From among the grand army that beleagured Paris, has gone the General that directed all its motions, but at home in the capital, Berlin, the welcoming crowds shout "the hero Von Moltke has come." So up yonder they crowd around the old hero, the friends that have been long waiting, a Guest, Bishop George, Bishop Emory, a Rozel, a Davis, a host who have gone on before, and heaven ere now, has rang with their shouts of welcome.

He is gone, but the lessons of his life are with you. It is not needed that I should further point their moral. They are traits of character that speak in no mistakable terms their own lessons; and through them—through that Devotedness to Jesus, through his Earnest Ministry, through his Spirit of Progress, through his Christian Patriotism, through his Love for Methodism. "He being dead, yet speaketh."





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